Focus on Public Health at The Commonwealth Fund

The Commonwealth Fund supports independent research on health care issues and makes grants to promote better access, improved quality, and greater efficiency in health care — particularly for society’s most vulnerable, including people of color, people with low income, and those who are uninsured.

The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated how weaknesses in the U.S. public health system — including its fragmented patchwork of public health law, regulation, data systems, and governance — have hindered the country’s ability to effectively and efficiently respond to public health threats and to carry out core public health functions.

In the wake of the pandemic, bipartisan efforts in Congress, the administration, and at the state level demonstrated a policy window for rethinking how we collectively rebuild our public health infrastructure in a more coherent and equitable way. In recognition of this opportunity, the Fund established a focus area on public health to support a cohesive body of work related to policy options for the stabilizing and modernizing of the public health system in the United States.

Through this focus area, the Fund aims to inform policy efforts to stabilize and modernize the U.S. public health system at the federal and state levels. To that end, we are interested in supporting research and analyses that advance the following strategies:

- Identify opportunities to align, federal, state, and local regulation and address regulatory complexities in future legislation.
- Explore real vs. perceived legal barriers to public health coordination that can be addressed via agency regulation and guidance.
- Identify models for the coordination of public health services and the delivery of care in the safety-net system.
- Support states in implementing public health policy changes via new investments from federal legislation.
- Monitor and explain recent legal challenges to public health authorities and the implications and precedents set for future public health efforts

Current Projects

- The Commonwealth Fund Commission on a National Public Health System (Johns Hopkins University)
- Public Health Capacity and the American Rescue Plan (Columbia University)
- Leveraging Federal and State Investments to Modernize Public Health: State Learning Collaborative (NASHP)

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